

## THE HISTORICAL TRAIL

Yearbook of the Historical Society of the  
New Jersey Annual Conference of the  
Methodist Church

---

Vol. 1

1962

No. 1

---

### FORWARD

The New Jersey Conference has a very significant place in Methodist History. Her influence has been felt and is known far and wide. We have made a world wide contribution in these last days through our own beloved Bishop, Fred Pierce Corson.

The Historical Society of the Conference, cognizant of its rich heritage at the Spring Meeting of the Executive Committee, decided we should emphasize some of the little known facts surrounding our early church in the State.

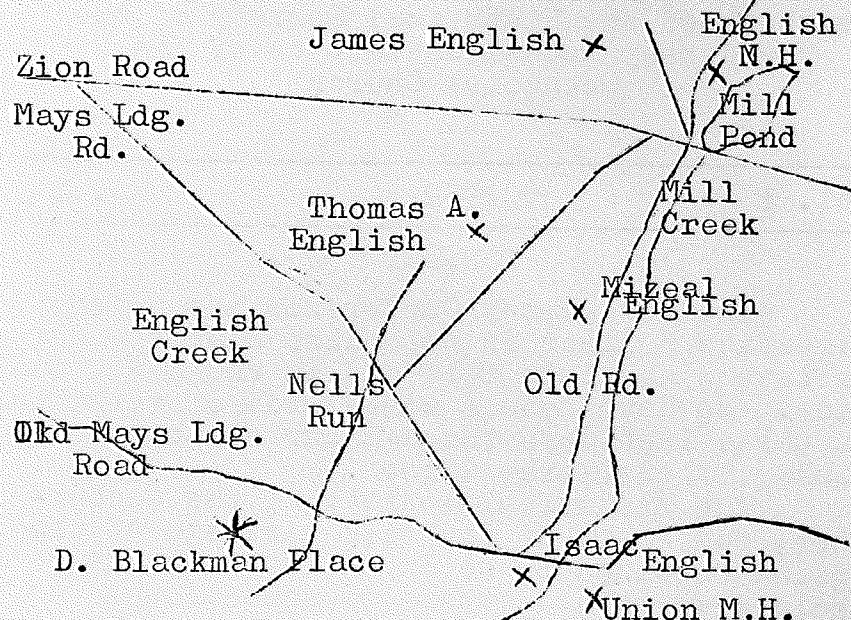
The Reverend Robert B. Steelman was appointed to assemble some interesting items from various persons for this little mimeograph pamphlet. We trust this will meet with approval and that the Society may continue to make known from Conference to Conference some of the pertinent facts concerning our early church.

Persons having historic knowledge of various Methodist places and personalities are cordially invited to write the editor concerning the same.

As President of the Society I want to express my thanks to all who have helped bring this idea and material into being.

(D. C. Evans)

## THE BLACKMANS OF GREAT EGG HARBOR



The Blackmans were an early family in the Jerseys. The records of old Monmouth County show the name appearing on the tax lists as early as 1690. Andrew Blackman was a member of one of these first families who came from Monmouth and settled at Great Egg Harbor in the early 1700's. He married by license, dated July 25, 1733, Mary (Steelman) Allen. Mary was the daughter of James and Susanna (Toy) Steelman who had previously been married to Daniel Allen of Monmouth County.

Andrew Blackman was a cordwainer by vocation and in his day, a man of some wealth. He owned large tracts of woodland and marsh between Patcong and Powells Creek, in what is now Egg Harbor Township.

Andrew Blackman was a staunch Presbyterian whose home was a preaching place of such divines as John Brainard, Philip V. Fithian and Nehemiah Greenman. On March 19,

1764, he conveyed by deed one acre of land for "the erection and standing of a Presbyterian meeting house," which came to be known as the Blackman Meeting House.

A son, David, was born in 1747. He was married to Mary Clark. They lived in English Creek and there reared a family of six sons and four daughters.

The years 1780 to 1790 marks the period of the firm planting of Methodism in Great Egg Harbor. At the Conference held in Baltimore in 1780, Francis Asbury assigned William Gill, John James and Robert Garrison to West Jersey Circuit. Benjamin Abbott who had almost singlehandedly kept Methodism alive during the war had preached at nearby Samuel Hewes and Thomas Champions at Mays Landing. David Blackman became sympathetic with the doctrine of 'Free Grace' preached by Gill, James and Abbott, the fiery preacher from Salem. He opened his home as a preaching station. Bishop Asbury, Henry Boehm, Richard Sneath and others preached there.

Three of the children of David and Mary Blackman made great contributions to Methodism in old Gloucester County and the western and northwestern territory. The three were sons, Nehemiah and Learner and a daughter, Sarah, who married a preacher.

Nehemiah, the eldest son, was converted by the preaching of Asbury. He married Sarah Smith, daughter of Capt. Micajah and Sarah (Owens) Smith of Wrangleboro (Port Republic). Nehemiah moved to Wrangleboro and for a number of years operated the Smith Mills.

Following the first Methodist revival in 1796-97, a class was formed with Nehemiah as leader. In 1837 a Society was organized and Nehemiah was one of the trustees. He died in 1847 and is buried in the

old yard near the fence. His monument reads  
...fifty-two years a member of the Methodist  
Episcopal Church.

Learner Blackman was born in 1781, the second son of David and Mary. He was converted by the first sermon preached by Rev. John Collins perhaps at the home of Learner. John Collins had married Sarah the sister of Learner in 1793.

Learner joined the Philadelphia Conference in 1800, on trial, at the age of 19 years. His first appointment was the Kent Circuit in Delaware. From 1801 to 1805, he served on the Kent and Dover circuits in Maryland and Delaware, the Russell and New River circuits in Virginia, then he went to Lexington, Kentucky and served on the mission to Natchez. He became a presiding elder in 1806 and served on the following districts: Mississippi, Holston, Cumberland and Nashville. During the War of 1812 he was, for a time, a chaplain to the Tennessee Volunteers.

On the way east to attend the General Conference in 1811, Learner stopped at St. George's Church in Philadelphia. It is said "that his clothing was found in such a dilapidated shape that the Methodist sisters made him a new suit before going to South Jersey."

On June 22, 1813, while serving on the Nashville District, he married Elizabeth Odom Elliot of Summer County, Tennessee, a widow of some means. In 1815, while crossing the Ohio River near Cincinnati in a flat bottomed boat, his horse became frightened of the sails of the craft and threw him in the river where he drowned. His body was recovered and is buried in the rear of the Old Stone Church, afterward Wesley Chapel, in Cincinnati. Abel Stevens says that, "He ranks as one of the great

men of early Methodism."

John Collins, son-in-law of David and Mary Blackman, was born in 1769 at Collins Mill, near Leeds Point, Great Egg Harbor. He was converted to Methodism in 1794 under the preaching of the riders of the Bethel Circuit, at Smithville Meeting House. He obtained a local preachers license and preached on circuits in West Jersey. Richard Sneath, writing in his Journal for Friday January 4, 1799 says, "preached at Englishes M.H. administered the sacrament and held love feast and (Glory to God) we had a pentecost. Br. Collins met me there who was very helpful in the stir."

In 1803, he and his family went west and settled on a large tract of land in Clermont County, Ohio. He preached his first sermon in Cincinnati in 1804. He became a collaborer in 1807 with Philip Gatch, who had served the early circuits in West Jersey. He organized a society in Dayton in 1808. He became a presiding elder of the Northwestern Territory in 1819. He died in 1845 and is buried in the little church yard at Bethel, near the road to Ripley, Ohio. His ministry abounded in all parts of Ohio, for his superior character and talents gave him extraordinary influence among all classes of the population. Among other eminent citizens he led into the church, John M'Lean, afterward judge of the Supreme Court of the nation and the biographer of the itinerant.

The Blackman family of Atlantic County should surely receive credit as being among the first families of early Methodism. They were important for Methodism in Southernmost Jersey, being among the founders of the societies in Port Republic (Wrangleboro), English Creek and Cedar Bridge, now Bargain-town. But their real claim to greatness lies

in giving to Methodism two preachers....  
Learner Blackman and John Collins.  
(Joseph Henry Bennett)

#### THE FOUNDING OF THE PENNINGTON SCHOOL

It was first called Queenstown in honor of Queen Anne. For many years it remained small, numbering about 12 houses. Later the village was called Pennytown, for it is said that in those days the one store sold things by the penny's worth and the tavern charged the traveler a penny for a night's lodging. By 1747 the village was called PENNINGTON! Legend has it that it predated Trenton, itself a colonial town, more than two hours by stage coach away. Tradition has it that it was once an Indian village, though the white settlement began about 1708.

Pennington featured in the Revolution, though not nearly so dramatically as nearby Washington's Crossing or the State Capitol. It is a matter of history that the town was overrun with Hessian troops through December 1776 while most of the townspeople had evacuated.

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Pennington was awakening. In 1826 a new Methodist Church was built; in 1836 Evergreen Hall, a private school for young ladies, was erected and during the same decade in 1838 Pennington Seminary was established.

Education of a preparatory nature scarcely existed throughout the U.S. in this period. Elementary schools had been organized but the majority of children did not attend because they were needed in the field or to labor in the factory. Only ten percent of the children completing elementary school proceeded to obtain further education. It took a great deal of prophetic courage, therefore, for the Philadelphia

Conference in 1836 to pass a resolution "to provide the means of a virtuous education for our people" and in the following year 1836 to create "a committee to consider the advisability of a Christian School to be located within the Conference confines." As a result of this committee's labors, the 1837 session of the Philadelphia Conference took action "Resolved: That the Presiding Elders be a committee to receive proposals for the establishing of two seminaries within the bounds of the Conference, viz; a Male and Female Academny."

During this period the N.J. Conference was formed from the Philadelphia Conference. The issue of creating a school in N.J. then became the business of the newly organized Conference. It was at its first meeting in Bridgeton on April 25, 1838, the N. J. Conference created a Committee on Education. As a result of much discussion, the Conference decided that the Jersey locality offering the largest subscription for the school should receive it.

There had come to Pennington in 1836, by appointment from the Philadelphia Conference, the Rev. John Knox Shaw, a most active man of thirty-seven in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of his ministry. Shaw was born April 10, 1800 in County Armagh, Ireland, not far from Belfast. The child was still in his mother's arms when the Shaw's came to America to settle on a farm in Cambridge, Washington County, N.Y.

John Knox Shaw was of Scotch-Irish descent, and as his first and middle names implies, was a Presbyterian. Young John grew up in the severely God-fearing strict environment of early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Calvinism. But he was not long to remain a Presbyterian. Philip Embury and Thomas Ashton, both from Ireland, had formed a Methodist Church

in America in Ash Grove in 1770. Bishop Asbury also went through the country and Shaw seems to have come under the influence of these men. Later as a teacher in White Plains N.Y. and Bloomfield, N.J. he became actively interested in the Methodist Church and by the steps of class leader, exhorter and local preacher proved himself so able he was received on trial at the session of the Philadelphia Conference April 14, 1825. He had a most enviable record in every phase of pastoral work.

When the Committee on Education made the proposal concerning the founding of a school, Shaw enthusiastically seized upon this opportunity for such a creative service to God. With indefatigable energy, Mr. Shaw canvassed the state of N.J. for subscriptions for the projected school until within the year allotted, \$5,000 had been collected. Mr. Shaw later wrote in his diary: "The labor attendant upon the establishment of the seminary was exhausting, but the Institution has been of incalculable benefit to the Church, and the work, so freely given, is not regretted."

When the N.J. Conference met in Trenton in 1839 a resolution was adopted "to obtain an act of incorporation... that we pledge our patronage to the contemplated academy at Pennington, Mercer County, so long as the said academy continues under the advisory control of the N.J. Conference." A month following the close of the 1839 session of N.J. Conference in April, the corner stone for the first building was laid with Bishops Hedding and Waugh in attendance. Also in the year 1839 the school was incorporated under the laws of the state of N.J. The following year saw the completion of the first building, launching the Pennington Seminary on its long career. Although an informal short

session was held in the Spring, it was in October 1840 that Pennington Seminary formally opened with Howard Bishop, a graduate of Rutgers University, as the teacher and with three students. The first President of Pennington was the Rev. Edward Cooke, D.D., a graduate of Wesleyan University.

(Charles R. Smyth, D.D.)

#### A HISTORY OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bishop Randolph Foster, at the Conference held in Salem in 1881, appointed R.J. Andrews, C.H. Whitecar and E. Green as a committee to plan for the organization of a Conference Historical Society. The following year a Society was formed with E.H. Stokes as President. After about 30 years the Society was discontinued.

The Minutes of the Annual Conference held at First Church, Asbury Park on March 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, 1929 contains the following: "The Committee on Organization of a Conference Historical Society would respectfully report that it has learned that such a Society was organized in 1882 and continued until 1913. Since then no list of officers has been published in the Conference Minutes, and no reference has been made to it except that in 1915 the Conference adopted the following resolution: "On motion of J. Morgan Read the Conference Historical Society was authorized to prepare a book on the history of the churches and members of the Conference." At this time, 1929, the Society was reconstituted with Alfonso Dare, President.

In 1933, permission was granted by the Conference for the Historical Society to hold meetings and make such repairs, to old abandoned churches, as may be necessary for their preservation. Use of the following buildings was granted: Roadstown, Harmony,

Cumberland County; Good-luck, New Bethel, and Sharon and any others the District Superintendents may designate.

PRESIDENTS OF THE SOCIETY

1882 - 1897 - E. H. Stokes  
1898 - 1900 - J. B. Graw  
1901 - 1913 - G. B. Wright  
1929 - 1947 - Alfonso Dare  
1947 - 1960 - Frank B. Stanger  
1960 - Present - David C. Evans  
(John W. Zelley)

LAY ACTIVITIES IN THE N. J. CONFERENCE

After the secession in 1832 and the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church due largely because Lay Representation in the Conference was not recognized, there seemed to be a lull in lay representation from the time our N.J. Conference was organized in 1837 until 1860 when a resolution of East Genesee Conference proposing Lay delegates to the General Conference was defeated in the N.J. Conference, 72 to 1.

At the General Conference of 1860, the Conference provided for the submission of the question of Lay Delegates to the Male membership and declared approval of its introduction into that body when it should be ascertained that the church desired it. In 1862 the N.J. Conference Local Churches voted on Lay Representation with the following results:

	For	Against
Trenton District	276	243
Burlington District	216	272
Camden District	228	206
Bridgeton District	239	256
	959	977

Six charges not reporting.  
The Conference voted 32 for and 76 against.

In 1868 the General Conference voted

to allow 2 Lay Delegates from each Conference to the General Conference in 1872 but it must be submitted to the Laity of the Church and to the Annual Conferences for ratification. The result of this election by the Male members of the Local Churches was as follows:

	For	Against
New Brunswick District	497	388
Trenton District	760	294
Burlington District	556	311
Camden District	566	319
Bridgeton District	895	318
	3274	1630

On motion the Annual Conference proceeded to vote on Lay Delegation. When the yeas and nays were ordered, 66 voted in the affirmative and 61 in the negative. (This fell far short of the three-fourths majority as required). The next day, Saturday, the resolution was reconsidered. After much deliberation it was laid over until Monday.

The discussion was resumed on Monday morning with speeches for and against. The debate carried into Tuesday morning and afternoon, with Bishop Matthew Simpson in the chair. Finally to hasten a vote, speeches were limited to ten minutes and no brother could speak more than once. When a vote was finally taken, 80 voted in favor and 52 against. It still lacked the three-fourths majority and Lay Representation was not approved.

Among thoses addressing the Conference in favor of Lay Representation were: S.E. Post, A.E. Ballard, T.D. King, S. Townsend, O.H. Tiffany, W.A. Wilmer, G. Hughes, J.F. Morrell, S. Parker, C.H. Whitecar and T. Hanlon. Those voicing their opposition to Lay Representation in the General Conference were: G.R. Snyder, J.B. Dobbins, J. Lewis, J. Fort, and C.E. Hill. (W. B. VanSant)

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

St. George's Methodist Church, Philadelphia is the depository for all records and historical items in the possession of your Conference Historical Society. The Society helps to maintain the Historical Center at Old St. George's. You are invited to visit this Historical Shrine of Methodism, open daily from 10-4.

The Graves Committee for the 3rd year has sought, with the aid of nearby churches, to locate and place a Christian flag on the grave of the deceased ministers who served churches of our Conference and are buried within our bounds. We are indebted to all who have participated in this memorial project and would urge others to do their part.

Anyone may become a member of the Society by the payment of annual dues of 50¢, payable to Mr. Walter B. VanSant, Treasurer, 333 Poplar Ave., Linwood, N.J.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President	David C. Evans
Vice President	Mark Reynolds
Vice President	Frank B. Stanger
Vice President	Robert B. Steelman
Vice President	Walter B. VanSant
Librarian, Custodian	J. Hillman Coffee
Secretary	John W. Zelley
Treasurer	Walter B. VanSant
Hon. Vice President	Newton W. Grice
Hon. Vice President	A. Alvin Whiting

Address all editorial correspondence to the Rev. Robert B. Steelman, 18 Fayette Street, Bridgeton, N.J. Your comments and suggestions will be appreciated.